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AUTHOR	Haley, Paul; Berry, Karen
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ABSTRACT

This resource packet presents some of the arguments for, and research about, parents playing an active role in the education of their children--not just by being supportive at home, but also by being involved in the school. The issues covered include: (1) the need for parent involvement; (2) goals of parent involvement; (3) types of parent involvement; (4) planning for parent involvement; (5) advantages of parent involvement; and (6) difficulties of parent involvement in culturally diverse schools. Brief descriptions of successful parent involvement programs in the Northeast are provided, as is a nationwide list of resource groups that support parent involvement in the schools. A 39-item bibliography is included. (PCB)

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Home and School as Partners

Helping Parents Help Their Children

Paul Haley
Karen Berry

Editor, Leslie F. Hergert

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HOME AND SCHOOL AS PARTNERS:

HELPING PARENTS HELP THEIR CHILDREN

Paul Haley

Karen Berry

1988

Edited by Leslie F. Hergert

The Regional Laboratory for Educational Improvement of the Northeast and Islands, 290 S. Main Street, Andover, MA 01810
617-470-0098

HOME AND SCHOOL AS PARTNERS:
HELPING PARENTS HELP THEIR CHILDREN

This packet pulls together some of the arguments for and research about parents playing an active role in the education of their children -- not just by being supportive at home, but by being involved in the school itself. The initial six sections discuss:

I. The Need for Parent Involvement
II. Goals of Parent Involvement
III. Types of Parent Involvement
IV. Planning for Parent Involvement
V. Advantages of Parent Involvement
VI. Difficulties of Parent Involvement

The three concluding sections list program, association, and print resources for further information or support.

I. THE NEED FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT

"A strong partnership between the home and school is needed if quality education is to be provided to all children. Parents and teachers, by working together, can reinforce each other's efforts. Without this cooperation, neither the parent nor the teacher can be fully effective."

Parent Participation for Effective Schools: Planning for Parent Involvement. Arizona Department of Education

Research has shown that parents and family are critical factors in children's education, particularly for those who are at risk of dropping out of school. Numerous studies demonstrate that the influence and support given by the family may directly affect the behavior of children in school, their grades, and the probability that they will finish high school.

Changing family structures have affected the impact parents can have on children's educational experiences. The support role traditionally played by the family -- supervising homework; monitoring progress; arranging family life so that children are prepared for school (sufficient sleep, proper meals, etc.); assuring school attendance; maintaining communications with the school; and participating in school activities -- is now often assumed by one person rather than two. Studies have indicated that children from single-parent homes are twice as likely to drop out of school as students living with both parents (Neill, 1979).

According to researcher Herbert Walberg, "Extensive evidence suggests that the efficiency of the home in fostering learning has declined for

several decades, but cooperative partnerships between the home and the school can dramatically raise education productivity." This resource packet examines the home-school relationship and how parents can be involved in reducing the risk of school failure.

Other research indicates that children who are at risk generally come from homes with weaker educational support systems. Even "highly conscientious students with good abilities might have special educational needs if they came from educationally disadvantaged families" (Levin, 1986). Data from a number of surveys has indicated that dropouts tend to come from certain kinds of families (Cipollone, 1986):

- large families
- single-parent (usually female) families
- families where the parents, as well as older siblings, have dropped out of school
- poor families
- families with child neglect and abuse problems
- non-English-speaking families

Given these factors, it is clear that educators must develop strategies for involving the families of at-risk youth in helping their children succeed at school.

II. GOALS OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

There is much that schools can do to foster the kinds of effective collaborations between school and home that will maximize student potential and improve staff morale. The overall goals of such involvement should include the following:

Improved Communication:

Schools can promote better communication between school and home on a number of issues, including the overall goals of the school; the progress of students, including results on statewide and local tests; and ways that parents can help students at home. There are many ways in which this communication can be achieved: newsletters; handbooks; notes and calls home; conferences; home visits; home learning packets; and class meetings.

Improved Input:

Schools can increase opportunities for parents to have input into the education of their children in a number of ways: by encouraging parents to participate in the setting of goals and in decisions that affect the school; by encouraging parents to participate in meeting these goals in structured ways; and by encouraging parents to design

and participate in parent education programs.

Improved Access:

Schools can greatly increase the amount and nature of access that parents have to the schools by providing many opportunities for parents and community members to participate in school functions and activities; and by encouraging parents to observe in the classroom, go on class trips, and in general be a presence in the schools.

Improved Support:

Schools can increase the kind of support they give parent organizations by providing a meeting room; by keeping the parent organizations informed of school affairs; and by encouraging their input into whatever decisions affect the quality of education in the schools.

III. TYPES OF PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Herrick and Owens have developed a continuum of types of parent involvement: home-school communication; parents as supporters of school activities; parents as learners; parents as teachers; parents as educational advocates/decision makers. Research has shown that communications, parents as learners, and parents as teachers are the types of involvement most likely to impact upon student achievement (Chrispeels and Meaney, 1985). The chart on the following page displays these categories, giving examples of typical parent involvement activities.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT CONTINUUM

	HOME-SCHOOL COMMUNICATION	PARENTS AS SUPPORTERS OF SCHOOL ACTIVITIES	PARENTS AS LEARNERS	PARENTS AS TEACHERS	PARENTS AS EDUCATIONAL ADVOCATES/DECISION MAKERS
(ACTIVE)	**Information Collaborators** • Check and sign homework • Receive home visits from teachers • Call homework hotline • Attend parent-teacher conference	**Organizer** • Fund raise • Chaperon field trips • Organize school functions • Be room mothers/fathers	**Workshop Participant** • Attend educational meetings on school program & curriculum • Make classroom observations • Attend parent educational workshops	**Instructor** • Tutor at home • Teach home-enrichment activities • Classroom volunteer-aide • Paid paraprofessional in classroom	**Advocate** • Organize community meetings • Write or send position letters • Speak at community, school district meetings on educational issues • Advocate at state level on special programs • Monitor special programs
(PASSIVE)	**Information Recipient** • Read success reports from teacher • Read academic progress reports • Read school newsletter	**Audience** • Attend open house • Attend special performances • Attend back-to-school nights • Attend family nights • Attend award assemblies	**Home Learner** • Read home-learning suggestions sent by school • Read information on community resources for parent-child activities • Read parenting books	**Home Learning Facilitator** • Listen to child read • Read to child • Monitor homework • Provide incentives • Take child to library • Facilitate family discussion • Provide learning enrichment activities • Model educational pursuits	**Decision Maker** • Give opinions on surveys • Participate in parent/school group • Participate on school improvement planning advisory committee • Participate on district community board

IV. PLANNING FOR PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Schools must reach out and get parents involved. To do this effectively, schools should plan involvement activities, taking into consideration overall goals, resources, and local conditions.

A typical planning process for parent involvement includes the following steps (Lowery, 1986):

Analyzing

- Survey community attitudes and interests.
- Learn as much as possible about key people, procedures, problems, programs, and policies.
- Determine how parents are currently involved in your schools.
- Identify new ways parents can be involved.

Action-Planning

- Develop a comprehensive parent-involvement policy.
- Prepare a parent-involvement plan that outlines goals, objectives, and strategies.
- Set priorities.
- Determine resources needed to supplement the existing channels for parent involvement.
- Analyze and develop new channels. Establish a procedure for using them effectively.
- Get community members involved in the planning.

Implementing

- Target programs to different audiences, making sure you tailor them to meet different needs.
- Get school staff involved. Make them aware that parent involvement is a school priority.
- Set timelines and meet them. Make everyone aware of deadlines and goals so as to work within those parameters.
- Find ways to highlight parent involvement in newsletters, news articles, recognition programs, and other communications avenues.

Evaluating

- Listen. What is being said and how are people reacting to your communications efforts?
- Survey. Ask people, through structured means, their opinions and reactions to what you have been doing.
- React to the feedback you obtain. Is it justified? What does it tell you about the effectiveness of your program? How can you use this feedback to improve your program?
- Be honest with yourself. Are you accomplishing your objectives? Are you using your goals to chart your course?

V. ADVANTAGES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

There are many advantages for all concerned -- students, parents and teachers -- to improving parental involvement in the schools. Some of the advantages, as outlined by Chrispeels and Meaney, are described below:

Improved Understanding:

Better communication between teachers and parents can increase understanding among all concerned and help minimize differences. Both teachers and parents receive another, fuller, view of the student: teachers gain insight into a student's individual needs and abilities; parents gain a greater understanding of what goes on in the classroom and of the teacher's and the school's expectations.

Improved Discipline:

Increased and improved communication between school and family can help minimize discipline problems as parents and teachers reinforce each other and avoid inconsistencies and blaming.

Improved Achievement:

Improved communication and discipline usually mean increased achievement for students as they see that education is important to their parents. Witnessing their parents' concern, student self-confidence grows. Seeing parents -- both their own and others -- involved in the school also gives students a sense that what goes on in school is relevant to the world outside.

Improved Support:

Parental and community support for the school will increase as parents are encouraged to become active participants in the education of their children and as they become more acquainted with the goals of the teachers and of the schools. Moreover, encouraging parents to contribute concretely to what is taught in the classroom by drawing upon their knowledge, including their culture and heritage, will not only broaden support for the schools but help minimize differences.

All of the above will help improve the atmosphere in the schools and will leave all parties feeling better about the whole process: students won't feel caught in the middle; parents won't feel criticized or intimidated; and teachers won't feel as overwhelmed by their task. If the education of children is seen as a cooperative effort, which draws upon the strengths of families and schools, much misunderstanding and bad feeling can be avoided and a positive attitude generated.

VI. DIFFICULTIES OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN CULTURALLY DIVERSE SCHOOLS

Schools may be culturally diverse in different ways. The student body may represent a different racial, ethnic, or cultural group than the faculty. The student body itself may include one or more minority cultures. The school may include a wide diversity of cultures. In culturally diverse situations, any effort to increase parental involvement usually encounters some difficulties, as described below (adapted from Novak and Dougherty):
The vast majority of parents want to help their children and value education as a necessary tool for their children's advancement. However, some parents may be unable to help for a variety of reasons: economic, time, child care, etc. In addition, some parents feel an enormous distance from the school as an institution representing a culture and values in which they may feel little stake, which they may well feel does not respect their culture nor value the contribution they could make to what goes on in the school. Also, some students may not want their parents involved -- at least initially.

The problem of cultural distance can be exacerbated by home visitors -- staff, teachers, or administrators who, however well meaning, and perhaps because of their own uneasiness, are condescending when speaking to parents, show disrespect for their culture and indicate that it is the parents or their culture that are responsible for the children's problems.

All of these problems can be alleviated by improved communication and by drawing upon the diversity of cultures represented in the school; by encouraging parents to share aspects of their culture with the class and the school; by creating an atmosphere that there is much that can be learned by all; and by making the school a welcoming place for everyone, not a place where some students and parents feel alien.

Research allows us to identify readily the parent and family factors that contribute to making a child at risk. Research also allows us to identify those meaningful and important ways that parents and families can contribute to children's educational success. The school must look to parents as resources, and it must consider creative methods for reaching out and addressing the needs of at-risk youth within the contemporary family structure.

The two sections that follow describe, first, some successful parent involvement programs in the Northeast, then national groups that support parent involvement in schools.

A Bibliography/Reference List of research cited in this packet as well as additional sources of information concludes this packet.

SUCCESSFUL PARENT INVOLVEMENT PROGRAMS

Examples of successful parent involvement programs from the Northeast are described below:

1. **EPIC (Effective Parenting Information for Children, Inc.)**
   1300 Elmwood Avenue
   Buffalo, NY 14216
   (716) 884-4064

   Parental involvement is one of the three significant dimensions in a rapidly growing program designed to join the home, school, and community in a mutually supportive cause to help prepare students to become responsible adults. EPIC offers workshops for the parents or guardians of children throughout the community. Parents have an opportunity to share concerns and problems about their children, while at the same time strengthening their parenting skills with assistance from home volunteers.

2. **LULAC Educational Service Center for Hispanic Families**
   312 Congress Avenue
   New Haven, CT 06519
   (203) 776-6254

   The goal of this program is to reduce the dropout rate and increase educational attainment levels of Hispanic middle and high school students. The Center implements four educational support and dropout prevention programs:

   1. Educational support and youth development
   2. Family advocacy and employability
   3. Parent organizing and parent involvement
   4. Educational talent search

3. **Parents League United for Students (P.L.U.S.)**
   303 Allegheny Street
   Jersey Shore, PA 17740
   Contact Person: Maile Marshal

   This group was formed to encourage parents and educators to work together to influence school board policies. They have conducted surveys and revised the district's homework policy. They also publish a newsletter.

RESOURCE GROUPS

Center for the Study of Parent Involvement (CSPI)
Daniel Safran, Director
College Avenue
Oakland, CA 94618

CSPI is an organization of volunteers that provides consultation and training opportunities through workshops and conferences for community workers, teachers, administrators, and involved parents.

Designs for Change
School Improvement Campaign
Chicago School Watch
(312) 922-0317

Designs for Change trains parents in Chicago and other cities in Illinois so that they can judge the quality of their schools and press for improvements. The group puts out a number of materials, including a handbook, **All Our Kids Can Learn to Read**, based on the "effective schools" research, to help parents evaluate urban schools.

The Home and School Institute (HSI)
Dorothy Rich, President
12012 16th Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20017

A nonprofit organization, HSI develops programs and publications to help build home/school/community partnerships in education.

Institute for Responsive Education
605 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, MA 02216
(617) 353-3309

IRE is a nonprofit public interest research and advocacy group promoting citizen participation in educational decision making and improvement. It puts out a number of publications, many of which focus on the work of parent and citizen groups in school improvement.

Massachusetts Advocacy Center
76 Summer Street
Boston, MA 02110
(617) 357-8431

An advocacy group working around educational issues, especially special education in New England, primarily in the greater Boston area.

National Committee for Citizens in Education (NCCE)
10840 Little Patuxent Parkway
Columbia, MD 21044
(301) 596-5300

NCCE is a national clearinghouse established to help parents become more involved in public education. It has a toll-free number where counsellors can answer questions about parent-involvement issues and specifically about state educational policies, etc. The number is 1-800-NETWORK.

National Congress of Parents and Teachers (PTA)
Melitta Cutright
Division of Communication
700 North Rush Street
Chicago, IL 60611

Operating at local, state, and national levels, the National PTA is the largest volunteer organization in the nation devoted to improving the quality of education and the well-being of children and youth. The National PTA unites parents, teachers, students, and other interested citizens.

Parents Coalition for Education in New York City
Claudia Butler, Director
24-16 Bridge Plaza South, Lobby Floor
Long Island City, NY 11101

This coalition, which is part of **Advocates for Children**, provides technical assistance to groups working around parent involvement issues in New York City.

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HOME AND SCHOOL AS PARTNERS: HELPING PARENTS HELP THEIR CHILDREN is one in a series of packets designed to assist schools and communities in increasing the chances of success for all students. Each packet introduces a specific aspect of the problem of students who fail to reach their full potential and provides descriptions of programs that have been shown to work in addressing that issue. Contact information is provided for every program listed, and an extensive bibliography points the way to further reading and research.

Other titles in the series include:

- *Good Beginnings for Young Children: Early Identification of High-Risk Youth and Programs That Promote Success*
- *Pregnant and Parenting Teens: Keeping Them In School*

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